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TAGS: PGOV PREL IN
SUBJECT: CONGRESS RETAINS CONTROL IN MANIPUR AS LOCAL PARTIES FALTER

REF: KOLKATA 00028, KOLKATA 00059, KOLKATA 00071

¶1. (U) Summary: The Congress Party gained control of the
Manipur Assembly, winning 30 out 60 seats, and partnering with
the Communist Party of India (CPI) to form an absolute majority.
 Local parties, including the Manipur People's Party, lost due
to their extreme political stances that did not resonate with
voters. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), a party that previously
didn't have a foothold in Manipur, won enough seats for national
recognition under the leadership of former Chief Minister W.
Nipamacha Singh. While the result was a victory for Congress,
it is unlikely to resolve the pressing social and economic
issues that make Manipur one of India's most backward states.
End Summary.

¶2. (U). Manipur Legislative Assembly election results indicate
that the incumbent Congress is one seat short of majority, but
remains the single largest party in the Manipur Assembly,
winning 30 of the 60 seats. Congress ally Communist Party of
India (CPI) won 4 seats, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) 5,
Manipur People's Party (MPP) 5, Nationalist People's Party (NPP)
3, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) 3 and Independents 10. The
Independents included six candidates backed by the United Naga
Council (UNC), the apex body of Nagas which had made the issue
of integration of Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur with Nagaland
its primary political platform.   The BJP, which had won three
seats in 2002, did not win any seats. The RJD for the first
time gained a foothold in the state, led by W. Nipamacha Singh,
a former Chief Minister and prominent political heavyweight.
His campaign consisted primarily of tirades against the
corruption of the Congress government and its inability to
declare a clear stand on the Armed Forces Special Powers Act
(AFSPA).

¶3. (U) The steering committee of the incumbent Secular
Progressive Front (SPF) met the same day and the CPI reportedly
offered to join the new government with the Congress to give it
an absolute majority. No decision has yet been made by other
parties like the NCP and RJD (which are partners of the United
Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in Delhi) about joining
the new government.

¶3. (U). Comment: The election results indicate that most
voters prefer a ruling government with a relatively moderate
approach on key issues such as Naga integration and the AFSPA.
The Congress position that fragmentation of Manipur was not
possible and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi's emphasizing that the

Center was seriously looking into the recommendations of the Jeevan Reddy Committee on AFSPA -- struck a chord with voters. The regional MPP campaigned with a rabid anti-national and anti-Naga tone and ended up adding only 3 to its previous tally of 2 seats. In addition, the anti-Manipuri and pro-Naga integration stance of the UNC only resonated in districts dominated by ethnic Nagas. Congress's superior statewide organizational network and resources as compared to other smaller parties was also significant factor in its victory. The reality for most of Manipur's citizens, who live in a one of India's most economically backward states, is that the Congress is the only party with real access to the Central government, which provides the funds to keep the state running. However, it is unlikely that the new government will address the problems of violence and corruption that plague the state.

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